



Monday, 4 November 1957,  
at 3.15 p.m.

**NEW YORK**

**CONTENTS**

	<u>Page</u>
Agenda items 30 and 31:	
Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees . . . . .	193
Review of the arrangements for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees . . . . .	193
Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees . . . . .	193
General debate. . . . .	195

**Chairman:** Mrs. Aase LIONAES (Norway).

**AGENDA ITEMS 30 AND 31**

**Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/3585/Rev.1 and Add.1, A/3613, chap. VI, sect. IV)**

**Review of the arrangements for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/3669)**

1. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Committee had decided (764th meeting) to devote eight meetings to the consideration of items 30 (Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and 31 (Review of the arrangements for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) of the agenda of the General Assembly. She proposed that both items should be examined at the same time.

It was so decided.

**STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES**

2. The CHAIRMAN invited the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to address the Committee.

3. Mr. LINDT (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), after paying a tribute to the memory of his predecessor, Mr. G. J. van Heuven Goedhart, said that in accordance with the terms of the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (General Assembly resolution 428 (V), annex), the activity of the High Commissioner was of an entirely non-political character, and was humanitarian and social. The basic responsibility of his Office was to provide international protection for refugees and to seek permanent solutions; one of the functions of protection was to ensure the widest possible freedom of choice for refugees. The High Commissioner also stressed the fact that his mandate did not apply to one particular region, but was of a global nature.

4. International protection, which was discussed in chapter III of the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/3585/Rev.1), was the

most important task assigned to the Office of the High Commissioner. The action which had been undertaken in that field had been continued and intensified during 1957. The Office of the High Commissioner had worked towards safeguarding the rights of refugees, improving their living conditions, and helping them to find employment or to become citizens of the country which had received them. Legal assistance for individuals had been developed to a suitable degree.

5. The High Commissioner recalled that the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>1/</sup> had been ratified by only twenty-one States; he made an appeal for the signatory States to ratify and for other States to adhere to the Convention as soon as possible.

6. With regard to the possible continuation of the mandate of the Office of High Commissioner, the High Commissioner referred to General Assembly resolution 727 (VIII). In dealing with that question, it was necessary to distinguish between the need for international protection and the need for material assistance. International protection was a continuing need; the refugee must be given such protection until his situation was settled through repatriation or naturalization. Material assistance, on the other hand, was needed only for as long as the refugee failed to become re-established. The purpose of material assistance should be to deal with a problem as soon as it arose in such a way as to provide a permanent solution as soon as possible. The Office of the High Commissioner could then intervene with enough speed and flexibility, through voluntary organizations, to ensure that its action would succeed; otherwise there was a residual problem, which made it necessary to continue material assistance. In that case, it was necessary to make an investigation in order to determine the extent of the problem and decide what measures should be taken.

7. The mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would expire on 31 December 1958. The United Nations Refugee Fund (UNREF) Executive Committee had unanimously decided to recommend that the Office of the High Commissioner should be continued after that date (A/3585/Rev.1, para. 79), but did not mention a definite period. The Economic and Social Council had recommended that the Office of the High Commissioner should be continued for five years (Council resolution 650 B (XXIV) of 24 July 1957). Neither body, however, had specified the manner in which material assistance should be given, since they considered that it rested with the General Assembly to take the necessary decisions on the matter.

<sup>1/</sup>United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons, held at Geneva, Switzerland, from 2 to 25 July 1951: Final Act and Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (United Nations publication, Sales No.: 1951.IV.4).

8. With regard to the problem of Hungarian refugees, it was pointed out that, thanks to the relaxing of immigration regulations and the usual formalities, and also to the assistance of the Inter-governmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), 165,000 out of a total of 199,000 refugees who had left Hungary within the past twelve months had been received by forty countries. The amount of financial assistance furnished either direct to the Office of the High Commissioner or to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, or bilaterally to the Austrian Government, had reached a total of more than \$20 million. To that should be added the emergency aid provided by the League of Red Cross Societies and the voluntary agencies. The amount of financial assistance would make it possible to reimburse the Austrian Government by the end of the year for most of the expenditure which it had incurred. Yugoslavia, on the other hand, had not derived equal benefit from international solidarity, and the Office of the High Commissioner was attempting to remedy that situation.

9. The number of Hungarian refugees repatriated from Austria and Yugoslavia, or from countries of second asylum, had reached about 13,400. The Office of the High Commissioner had taken care that no pressure should be brought to bear on refugees to make them return to their own country. There were still 23,500 refugees in Austria and Yugoslavia. The Office of the High Commissioner had made many requests to some Governments to accept a larger number of refugees, particularly aged or sick refugees, classified as "difficult cases". It should be mentioned that the Scandinavian countries had accepted some tubercular refugees who had been refused by the other Governments.

10. For refugees who wished to settle in Austria, the Office of the High Commissioner was setting up a programme for which there was a fund of \$3.5 million, which would make it possible to assist the settlement of approximately 5,000 persons.

11. Many lessons applicable to the problem of refugees in general could be drawn from what had been done for the Hungarian refugees. The action which had been taken to help Hungarian refugees had been most effective because it had been forthcoming immediately and because the burden of assistance had been divided among a large number of countries. It had thus been proved that the only satisfactory and most economical way to solve the refugee problem was to try to effect permanent solutions immediately.

12. The same principle should be applied in the case of refugees who had been victims of the First or Second World War or of the upheavals which had occurred between the two wars. There were still 39,000 of those refugees living in 199 camps; there were also those who were living outside camps in a certain number of countries and whose numbers had not yet been ascertained. Among the latter, refugees of European origin in China presented a difficult problem. It had been possible, since 1952, with the co-operation of the ICEM, to resettle more than 9,000 of those refugees in various countries particularly in Brazil and Australia. As exit visas could now be obtained more easily than in the past, there was an influx of such persons into Hong Kong and that fact presented the Office of the High Commissioner with extremely difficult financial problems. It was estimated that the number of refugees

in transit in Hong Kong would stabilize at about 1,500 persons in the near future. The resources of the Office of the High Commissioner would not enable it to deal with the situation if the refugees' stay should be prolonged indefinitely. The ICEM had made an appeal to Governments, but the response to the appeal had not as yet resulted in its obtaining the funds needed for the transportation of refugees in 1958.

13. The High Commissioner recalled the recommendation of the UNREF Executive Committee that the General Assembly should take into account the problem of the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong when considering the future arrangements for the Office (A/3585/Rev.1, para. 11).

14. The only way to solve the problem of the "old" refugees was to establish priorities and to adhere to them. During the next three years the most urgent question would be the closure of camps. Under no circumstances could shelter in a camp be considered a permanent solution; its effects on the morale of the refugees were unfortunate. There were still 52 camps in Austria, 118 in Germany, 14 in Greece, 13 in Italy and 2 in Turkey, or a total of 199 camps with 39,000 refugees. Nine thousand five hundred of the refugees living in those camps were eligible for assistance under the United States Escapee Program, and the Office of the High Commissioner, while continuing to guarantee their international protection, was not directly concerned with their resettlement. Of the remaining 29,500 refugees, 80 per cent belong to family units. It was likely that 2,154 would be able to emigrate by the end of 1958; some 2,000 or 3,000 other refugees who would like to settle in such countries as Australia, Canada or the United States of America could not do so because of the existing immigration regulations. Frequently when one refugee was refused a visa, a whole family decided not to emigrate so as not to separate. The Office of the High Commissioner felt that it was particularly important that the countries of immigration should accept the principle of family unity to as great an extent as possible. There would be no increased risk; on the contrary, an element of stability would be added. Many European countries were already applying that principle and the legislation recently enacted by the United States was a step in the right direction.

15. For the refugees who did not wish to be repatriated and who could not emigrate, integration in the host country was the only possible solution. In that case, the main problem was housing. Many refugees who were earning their living were staying at a camp only because they could not live anywhere else. Such refugees, who were only half integrated, represented approximately 52 per cent of the 29,500 refugees he had mentioned. If one added to that number the refugees who could leave the camps if employment in addition to lodging were secured for them, the number would come to approximately 65 per cent of the total. A rather more serious problem concerned the 10,323 refugees who were members of households whose heads came within the categories of difficult cases, physically handicapped persons or refugees difficult to settle because of social or economic handicaps. Institutional placement, rehabilitation or other permanent solutions had to be found to fit the conditions of each case.

16. If the General Assembly approved the recommendations of the Economic and Social Council and the UNREF Executive Committee, the Office of the High

Commissioner would intensify its programme for permanent solutions; it thus hoped to be able to close all the camps then in existence by the end of 1960, but in order to do so it must have the necessary funds at its disposal. Taking into account all governmental contributions, pledges and promises made to date, the Office required a further \$7.5 million; that sum should be pledged by 1958 so that the Office could draw up plans for fulfilling its task within the specified time limit.

#### GENERAL DEBATE

17. Mrs. ELLIOT (United Kingdom) thanked the High Commissioner for the statement he had just made and congratulated him on the remarkable work he had done, both for Hungarian refugees and the UNREF programme. Since the end of the Second World War the United Kingdom Government had always supported international action on behalf of refugees and its total contributions had amounted to approximately £180 million. Her Government hoped that when the present UNREF programme was concluded, at the end of 1958, most of the refugees would have been resettled and all the camps would be closed. Unfortunately, the inadequacy of the financial resources at the disposal of the Office of the High Commissioner had not made it possible to carry out the various plans in full; in order to arrive at a definitive solution of the problem, all Governments and, it was to be hoped, particularly those which had not yet contributed, would have to make a special effort so that UNREF would have adequate funds. For its part, the United Kingdom Government had already announced that it would make a donation of £80,000 in 1958, plus an additional contribution of £20,000 if total governmental contributions reached \$3.5 million that year. Subject to parliamentary approval, it would also contribute £100,000 in 1959. In the view of the United Kingdom Government, the resettlement of refugees could not be made indefinitely an international responsibility; it should be transferred to the host countries as soon as possible. The question of closing the camps should continue to be the primary concern, and efforts to solve that problem once and for all should be redoubled. The United Kingdom Government was gratified at the progress of the work for the Hungarian refugees and hoped that through the combined efforts of Governments, the Office of the High Commissioner and charitable organizations, the fate of all the refugees would soon be settled satisfactorily.

18. The UNREF Executive Committee had recommended that the General Assembly should examine the problem of the Chinese refugees in Hong Kong at its twelfth session (A/3585/Rev.1, annex I, appendix II, resolution No. 5). That problem was indeed a serious one since those refugees now numbered over 700,000 and therefore represented one-fourth of the total population of that small, over-populated area. The burden was a heavy one for the authorities which had generously welcomed war victims, and it was constantly growing. The lot of the refugees was often tragic. Despite the Government's efforts—which were considerable—there were still 262,000 squatters; 64,000 refugees were living on roof-tops and 14,000 had no other home than the street. If the Government had the necessary funds and personnel, new lodgings would be found for 230,000 refugees in the coming six years. She said that the Hong Kong Government had spent

over £2.5 million on resettlement plans since 1954 and the budgetary allocations for the current fiscal year amounted to £1,250,000. To those sums should be added those which were necessary to give the refugees medical care, to provide for their education, and so forth. Despite the valuable aid of charitable organizations—local as well as international—it was obvious that the problem of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong should be a matter of concern to the international community generally, and that could be solved only through international action. All the aid that could be extended would be gratefully received, whether it came from Governments or non-governmental organizations, and whether it was in cash or in kind. The United Kingdom Government was prepared to study all suggestions that might be made, it being understood that it would continue, with the Hong Kong authorities, to do its utmost to alleviate the suffering of the refugees.

19. In so far as the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner was concerned, the United Kingdom delegation—while hoping that the operations of the United Nations Refugee Fund could be terminated as soon as possible—recognized that international action was still necessary. That was why it had voted for Economic and Social Council resolution 650 B (XXIV) of 24 July 1957 recommending an extension of the Office for a period of five years from 1 January 1959. It seemed that the influx of refugees would not be fully stopped during the coming years; moreover, complete assimilation in the host country generally required a rather long time, during which the refugee might need international protection. Although the refugee problem was not on the verge of disappearing, it might change character, however. The United Kingdom delegation therefore believed that in the coming years the provisions concerning the Office of the High Commissioner should be reviewed; it would support any draft resolution along those lines which might be put before the Committee.

20. Mrs. LORD (United States of America) announced that the United States delegation together with other delegations intended to submit a draft resolution concerning international assistance to refugees under the mandate of the High Commissioner.

21. When the current mandate expired there would still be more than two million refugees in the world. Many of them would have little or no further need for international protection but there would remain much to be done for others both from the legal and from the political points of view. The Office of the High Commissioner had made some very encouraging progress; it was for that reason that the United States delegation was whole-heartedly in favour of the extension of its mandate for five years from 1 January 1959.

22. By the end of the current year nearly nine-tenths of the Hungarian refugees would have received material assistance sufficient to enable them to find a permanent solution to their difficulties. All those who had made that possible—United Nations personnel and representatives of national and international charitable organizations—merited the highest praise. The work done by the Office of the High Commissioner was particularly laudable. It had been useful in itself and at the same time it had brought out the importance

of the part which the United Nations could play in the solving of international humanitarian problems.

23. The United Nations Refugee Fund, which had begun its operations only in the last months of 1956, would, to judge by the results already obtained, reach its principal objective by the end of 1958, assuming, of course, that it could secure all the money it required to carry out its programme. She noted with satisfaction that a high priority had been given to plans for the closing of the camps.

24. Mr. CHENG Paonan (China) was happy to note that thanks to the untiring efforts made jointly by the inter-governmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations, the problem of the Hungarian refugees had lost much of its urgency. He hoped that the High Commissioner would continue to receive support for his plan of permanent solutions for the remaining unsettled Hungarian refugees in the countries of first asylum. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the High Commissioner had assumed responsibility for the Jewish refugees expelled from Egypt at the beginning of 1957. It believed that his mandate should be interpreted as broadly as possible so that protection might be afforded to all refugees regardless of their race, religion or political affinity.

25. The High Commissioner's report appeared to indicate (A/3585/Rev.1, chap. III) that the legal protection of refugees had on the whole been strengthened; his Government would accede to the Protocol for extending the period of validity of the Convention on the Declaration of Death of Missing Persons.

26. It was encouraging to note that thanks to the work of the High Commissioner's Office the rate of resettlement of refugees including a number of difficult cases had risen considerably in 1956. His delegation hoped that the High Commissioner would continue to be vigilant in ensuring that repatriation was always freely agreed to by the persons concerned.

27. In two years, 30,000 refugees had benefited from the UNREF programme of permanent solutions and emergency aid. That was a satisfactory achievement, yet there had been many projects which could not be carried out owing to lack of funds. It would therefore be impossible to carry out the programme in full before the expiration of the High Commissioner's mandate, which ought to be extended.

28. The Chinese delegation hoped that the High Commissioner's Office would continue to collaborate closely with many governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations since their co-operation, which had been so valuable during the Hungarian crisis, was essential for any improvement in the lot of refugees.

29. He recalled that ever since the sixth session of the General Assembly in 1952 his delegation had constantly drawn attention to the acuteness of the problem of Chinese refugees in Hong Kong (A/3585/Rev.1, annex I, paras. 104-113). The situation had become still more serious and the number of refugees was increasing from year to year at a more rapid rate than in any other country. The reasons for the influx were well known. Information in that connexion had been given in a report published in 1954<sup>2/</sup> after an exhaustive investigation by Mr. Hambro, formerly Registrar of the International Court of Justice. The UNREF Executive Committee had adopted two resolutions on the subject<sup>3/</sup> and in the second had suggested that the General Assembly should examine the question; it was incumbent on the latter, therefore, to study it and to seek a solution.

30. The Hong Kong authorities and many voluntary organizations, both local and international, had provided the Chinese refugees with a certain amount of assistance and the Government of the Republic of China was sincerely grateful to them. It was a fact, nevertheless, that that group had so far been the most neglected of all refugees. The Chinese Government and people had done all in their power to help them: 164,147 persons had been received into Taiwan and large sums of money had been contributed by Chinese all over the world and by the Free China Relief Association.

31. Those who had opposed any provision by the United Nations for those refugees had advanced legal arguments which could not outweigh the humanitarian considerations. As Mr. Hambro had pointed out in his report, the problem was truly international and to refuse to grant those refugees international assistance because of a legal technicality would be inconsistent with the interest taken in other groups of political refugees.

32. It seemed to his delegation unthinkable that the General Assembly should not do for refugees of Chinese origin in Hong Kong what it had done in Europe and elsewhere for refugees of European origin. China was sure that the United Nations would assume that elementary responsibility and so give those destitute persons the hope of a new life.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.

<sup>2/</sup>Edvard Hambro, *The Problem of Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong* (Leiden, A. W. Sijthoff, 1955).

<sup>3/</sup>See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Tenth Session, Supplement No. 11*, annex, resolution No. 1; and *ibid.*, *Twelfth Session, Supplement No. 11*, annex I, appendix II, resolution No. 5.